



League of Women Voters of NYS **STATE VOTER**

April 2014



From the President

Since the last State Voter, the NYS Legislature has passed another on-time budget. The League had been hoping for inclusion of comprehensive campaign finance reform in the budget, but were disappointed when the Governor and Legislature reached a deal that fell far short of our goals. There is rumor that a proposal may still be considered during the regular legislative session, but we are not optimistic that a full package of reforms will even be proposed. We will continue to fight on this issue and will keep you informed of any pending legislation.

The LWVUS Convention is being held in Dallas on June 6-10 and many of our local Leagues are sending delegates. The full Convention Kit, including proposed budgets, nominating committee report and proposed program is now available on the LWVUS website. Even if you are not sending a delegate, be sure to look at the proposals and let us know your concerns.

The State League will be holding its biennial Council meeting by mail. Look for the Council Kit in the mail in early May. We need at least half of all of our local Leagues to approve the budget for the 2014-15 fiscal year. No program changes are being considered so it is only the budget on which your local League needs to take action. Please address the budget at your annual meeting, membership meeting or open board meeting and return the completed form to the state office by June 20.

Finally, the fall election is coming. Vote 411 continues to grow with new Leagues signing up for the license again this year; contact your local League to see how you can help make this a successful program. The State League will offer for purchase Voters Guide Part I and Part II; Part I will include the general voting and election information while Part II will include information on the candidates on the statewide races and the two ballot proposals: redistricting and the education technology bond. We have also asked each local League to schedule a educational meeting in September or October to discuss the Redistricting Amendment on the state ballot; the state League will provide you with program-ready materials for this meeting.

Stay tuned as the legislature returns to Albany next week after a 3 week recess - we'll keep you informed on our many important issues!

Sally Robinson, President
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IN THIS ISSUE

Issues and Advocacy

Energy, Agriculture & Environment

Judicial Issues

Pay Equity Day

Vote 411

Regional Workshops - A Big Success

Youth Programs

Development Update

Local League News

Big League Raffle

The annual Big League Raffle is again underway. All members were sent 2 books of tickets. Local League Presidents were sent an additional 5 books in case members are looking for more. Remember that the more you sell, the more money the local League receives, too! It's a fundraiser for both the state League and your own local League. Return the sold ticket stubs to the state office **by May 16th** to be included in the drawing. **You can't win if you don't buy a ticket.** Call the state office at 518-465-4162 to have more tickets sent to you!

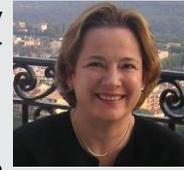
Membership Tip

LWV of Syracuse offers a 6 month trial League membership. This provides people the opportunity to get to know the League prior to joining officially. They have had good results in switching these trials into regular members. Contact LWV of Syracuse for more information.

Issues and Advocacy

Sally Robinson, robintwins@gmail.com

The finalized 2014-15 state budget produced mixed results for the League's advocacy efforts this budget season. Here is a summary of the outcomes for our two major issues of concern to us this past budget season.



Campaign Finance Reform

After months of persistent advocacy with our good-government partners, the League is extremely disappointed that Governor Cuomo and the legislature failed to include comprehensive campaign finance reform in the final state budget deal that was passed. While the finalized budget slightly enhances enforcement and improves disclosure of independent expenditures, the final reform package falls woefully short of what is needed to ensure a fair, functioning, and uncorrupt government working on behalf of all New Yorkers. This budget agreement omits fundamental and long-sought reforms such as reasonable limits on campaign contributions, housekeeping accounts, and party transfers and the closure of the LLC loophole. The system of public financing limited to candidates for State Comptroller during the current election cycle is woefully lacking in both time and scope to be effective as a pilot program - as such, the League joined with our good-government allies in encouraging State Comptroller DiNapoli and his potential opponent(s) to refuse to participate in the deeply flawed program. While the governor and Senate Co-Leader Klein have said that more reform could be considered in the remaining legislative session, neither has taken action that would confirm this possibility. The League, of course, will continue to work with our allies to push the Governor and legislature to enact real and comprehensive reform.

Education Funding

The League continued to fight hard this budget season for equitable and adequate public school aid. After a great deal of advocacy to kill the bill, the education investment tax credit (proposed by the Senate leadership with tacit approval from the governor) was rejected by the Assembly and ultimately left out of the final budget deal. That proposal would have provided tax credits to individuals, corporations, and partnerships that donate money to public schools, to privately operated charter schools and, through "education scholarships," to students who attend schools that provide religious education - creating a special class of education investors with significant influence in shaping education policy and funding direction. We remain vigilant on the issue, as the proposal may well come up again in the remaining months of this legislative session.

Ultimately our public school champions in the Assembly were able to negotiate \$500 million more in school aid over the Governor's original proposal, resulting in a \$1.1 billion school aid increase. While the additional aid will save many programs and educational opportunities, it still does not reverse previous cuts and harmful policies. Additionally, the Governor's two-year tax freeze was passed in the final budget legislation. This provision will provide income tax credits for the next two years in the form of rebate check to homeowners equivalent to the increase in their school tax bill, but only if their school district adopts a budget with a tax increase within its tax levy limit. The freeze is highly inequitable and will help the poorest communities the least. The tax freeze rebates are projected to cost the state \$400 million in 2014-15, money that could have instead been allocated to school aid statewide.

National Popular Vote

Success! On April 15 Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed a bill that will add New York State to the Compact for the National Popular Vote. LWVNY was very instrumental in getting LWVUS to adopt the study of the Compact for the National Popular Vote in 2008 and getting the Convention to adopt the position in favor of it in 2010. Now NYS has joined the signers of the Compact! The bill commits New York's 29 electoral votes to the 136 that have already committed to the interstate compact, which will take effect upon reaching 270 pledged votes, the amount needed to guarantee a majority in the Electoral College.

Election Reform Forum

The League co-sponsored an educational forum with the Rockefeller Institute on election reform issues, including early voting, better ballot design, improved voter registration and absentee ballot procedures. Legislative Elections Committee Chairs, Senator Thomas O'Mara and Assemblymember Michael Cusick joined Tom Wilkey, former Executive Director of the US Election Assistance

Commission and former Executive Director of the NYS Board of Elections, and Daniel Kolb, Co-Chair of the NYS Bar Association's Special Committee on Voter Participation, on this panel discussion. Capitol Correspondent Susan Arbetter moderated. Click [here](#) to watch a videotape of the event. The link is also posted on the state League website.

Energy, Agriculture and the Environment ***Beth Radow, enradow@gmail.com***

The League of Women Voter of New York State contracted with Labyrinth Consulting Services, Inc. to perform an evaluation of potential economically recoverable Marcellus shale natural gas in New York as a result of determining that New York State's proposed 2014 Energy Plan lacks this vital information. The report: *Resource Assessment of Potentially Producing Natural Gas Volumes from the Marcellus Shale, State of New York*, which was completed by petroleum geologist Arthur Berman and petroleum engineer Lyndon Pittinger, both with more than 30 years' experience in the energy business, concludes that New York is unlikely to have economically recoverable shale gas volumes at current gas prices and overall, resource estimates are significantly smaller than those indicated in previous. This report may be reprinted with permission of the League of Women Voters of New York State. Click [here](#) to view the full report and click [here](#) for the press release are attached. Both are also posted on the state League website. Beth Radow and Art Berman also discussed the report on Susan Arbetter's Capitol Pressroom radio program which is archived [here](#).



JUDICIAL SPECIALIST

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Earlier this year, the State League joined the Coalition for More Family Court Judges, a group that now encompasses over 80 organizations which deal with issues related to children and families. Under the leadership of Denise Kronstadt and Stefanie Gendell, members of the coalition visited lawmakers in Albany to advocate for the inclusion of funding for 20 more Family Court judges in the state budget. They encountered wide-spread bipartisan support for the funding in addition to substantial awareness of the dire needs of the overburdened Family Courts. The item was passed as part of the overall judiciary budget, and the governor signed it.

The coalition is now working on next steps. In order to make the addition a reality, New York State statutes have to be amended, because current statute specifies the number of judges for NYC and the upstate counties. New York City, whose Family Court judges are appointed by the Mayor, needs the relevant amended legislation. Upstate counties, where Family Court judges run for election, also need their statute amended. Therefore coalition members will have to continue to advocate for passage of these statutes, otherwise the issue will become mute. In addition, decisions will have to be made where the additional judges will sit. Ideally, the new assignments should be based on caseload per judge in the different counties.

The backlog in cases to be resolved is staggering. The lives of children and families are hanging in the balance, and it is of great importance to have sitting judges who are familiar with the history of the cases and able to make the best possible decision as quickly as possible in each case. League members are urged to speak to their perspective lawmakers to bring the process to a successful conclusion.

In other judicial news, the governor has appointed three additional judges to the Appellate Division of the Third Department. They are Christine Clark of Schenectady and Eugene Devine and Michael Lynch of Albany. The three judges, who serve immediately, will help reduce the backlog of cases on appeal. The governor has also appointed a Commission on Youth, Public Safety & Justice. Among other issues, the commission will address the current NYS statute which treats 16-17 year olds as adults in adult criminal court. North Carolina is the only other state using adult court for children at such a young age. The League should keep an eye on new policy developments on all of the issues mentioned above and advocate, when appropriate.

PAY EQUITY SPECIALISTS

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Leagues across the state participated in Equal Pay Day Activities, calling attention to the ongoing need for pay equity and the Women's Equality Act. Local Leagues were successful in getting proclamations signed and presented, letters to the editors in the local papers, and articles about the issue in the media. Thanks to everyone who worked to spread the word. Click [here](#) to see the roundup of the activities.



VOTE 411

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This year Vote 411 will have some new benefits for the public. First, Vote 411 will provide a State Calendar of Candidate Meetings. Yes, each state will have its' own calendar, and the public will have easy access to Candidate Meeting information. Second, leagues will be able to post a .pdf of their Vote411 Voter Guide by extracting their information from Vote411 and saving it for public access via Vote411. That will give the public an easy way to see who is running in their surroundings. So, this will be an exciting year, with Vote411 expanding its' features, as more leagues in the state are providing Vote411 Voter Guides and generating public awareness.

More information about Vote 411 and how the local Leagues can maximum the benefits of this program is included in the handouts from the regional training workshops. Click [here](#) to view those documents.

Regional Training Workshops - A Big Success!

Workshops were held in 4 locations across the state during March and April. Almost 200 people, representing 33 local Leagues and the 3ILO's, attended the sessions. Attendees commented that the sessions were incredibly informative and they greatly enjoyed sharing stories, successes and problems, with League members from their area. Thanks to the office staff, and Marianna Stout, Dare Thompson, Arlene Hinkemeyer, Lisa Scott, Kathy Stein, Susan Wilson, Carol Mellor and Barbara Bartoletti for presenting the information at the workshops! All of the handouts from the workshops are available on the state website homepage (click [here](#)). And, call the state office if you have questions or would like more information.



Youth Programs

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Over the past years as director of youth programs, I have urged Leagues to let us know what youth programs your League is doing so we can put it on our website and other Leagues can learn and benefit from your experiences. On April 3, my local League ran "Running and Winning" We had first learned of this program at a national convention, had done it on a small scale last year with the girl scouts following the material we had received from the LWV of the Hamptons. This year we had received a grant (using the contact

that LWV of Hamptons gave us) that enabled us to provide this program to 42 local high schools students. As we always do, we had evaluated last year's workshop where girls had to do a campaign to get out the youth vote, and decided it would be more meaningful to have the girls create a virtual woman candidate, giving her a name, a background, a platform, and a logo to put on a bumper sticker, which were presented to the entire group at the end of the program. The results were amazing. Each candidate was unique and ran the gamut of the political specter. One candidate was both pro-life and pro-environment. Some people who identify strongly with one party or another, may question this platform but to me it exemplified what we were encouraging these young women to do, ie, be creative, think for themselves, and come up with what they think is an ideal candidate, not one that necessarily fits in a box. The students, the elected women politicians, the League facilitators, and the teacher chaperones, as well as the reporter from Newsday, all agreed that Running and Winning provided a wonderful experience, not only for the students but the adults. Everyone left energized and feeling hopeful for our future. I feel more certain than ever that Leagues can learn from one another and by adapting youth programs to fit their own Leagues and communities, everyone can win.

Workshop gives young women taste of politics

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Alexa McDonald, of Half Hollow Hills East High School, speaks on behalf of her team as the LWV of Huntington sponsors a program called "Running and Winning" at the Dolan Center, Thursday, April 3, 2014. (Credit: Steve Pfost)

DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Are you a mother who has it all?

Mother's Day is the perfect time for families to make a gift to the League in honor of the women that make them great. Many of your children have grown up watching you work tirelessly for the League and know how much the League means to you. This Mother's Day, instead of sending flowers, ask them to consider making a gift to the League in honor of that commitment. Honorary gifts are a terrific way to get families involved in the League and help "Make Democracy Work."

Create a Lasting Legacy for the League

The League has been around for almost 100 years, in part because of the vitality of our members and mission, and also because members who have gone before have remembered the League in their wills. Bequests are the most popular way donors make deferred gifts. By making a bequest to the League, you can maintain control of your assets during your lifetime and still support the League for the next generation of members. You can make a bequest that is a percentage of your estate or stipulate a specific dollar amount. To find out more about naming the League in your will, contact Kate Jankowski, Communications and Development Coordinator, at (518) 465-4162 or via e-mail at kate@lwny.org.

Big League Raffle

Don't forget to sell those Raffle tickets to benefit both the State League and your own local League! The more you sell, the more your local League receives. And, you can't win if you don't buy a ticket - last year's winner received over \$2,600 and an additional \$500 was sent to her local League because she had the winning ticket!

LOCAL LEAGUE NEWS

The **LWV of Geneva** is seeking nominations for the Agnes Slosson Lewis Award to recognize women with leadership ability who inspire others and have a broad interest in the community and good government in their area. Agnes Slosson Lewis was one of the founders of both the LWV of Geneva and the LWV of New York State.

Congratulations to the LWV of Saratoga County for raising \$1,300 at their annual Famous Person Fundraiser last month. Over 50 event guests enjoyed an hour with Sojourner Truth as represented by actress, D. Colin.



An April 9, a public forum titled, "How Access to Health Care is Changing on the East End" was sponsored by the **LWV of the Hamptons** Health Committee. This event was well-attended and was the first of four events that committee held in April.

The **LWV of Buffalo/Niagara** will be hosting their next "Great Decisions" meeting on the topic of Modern Israel's struggle with the Palestinians.

On April 21, Supervisor Rick Morrissey and Councilmen Garrity, Clinchy, Cerieco and Faulkner will meet with members of the **LWV of Somers**. This annual event provides a forum for a stimulating discussion of Town issues and concerns. What are the infrastructure needs of the Town? How many housing proposals have been submitted to the Board? Is affordable housing included in the plans? How can the League and the Town Board coordinate their activities? In Shelter Island, the **LWV of Shelter Island** held its Seventh Annual State of the Town Luncheon with Supervisor Jim Dougherty addressing the community about Town business and Island issues.

May is the month when many Leagues are planning for their annual meetings and fundraisers. The **LWV of Buffalo/Niagara** will honor several members at their annual meeting and they are presenting Making Democracy Work award to community activist Bill Nowak. The **LWV of the Hamptons** will sponsor a "Sag Harbor Salute" which will include a walking tour of Sag Harbor and a presentation by the deputy mayor on, "Sag Harbor and Its Future." The **LWV of Broome and Tioga Counties** annual meeting will feature our own state League executive director, Laura Ladd Bierman, as guest speaker. At the annual meeting of the **LWV of Rensselaer County**, guest speaker, Casey Seiler, State Editor

of the Times Union and Co-Host of New York Now on WMHT, will discuss current happenings in state government. The **LWV of Brookhaven's** annual luncheon featured a presentation giving a historical perspective on Women's Suffrage. The **LWV of Somers** is hosting a Book and Author luncheon as a fundraiser next month. County Executive Vince Horrigan will provide a "Chautauqua County Update" at the annual meeting of the **LWV of Chautauqua County** where they will also honor Paula Coats and Laura Sarek as "Leaguers of the Year."

Last month, members of the **LWV of Rensselaer County** joined members of the **LWVs of Saratoga and Albany Counties** to meet with four legislators and advocate for Campaign Finance Reform.



On March 24, **LWV of NYC** chapter held an event [celebrating the legacy of Shirley Chisholm](#), the first African-American woman to be elected to the U.S. Congress. The City League announced an individual membership category named in her honor. The celebration was hosted by Congressman Hakeem Jeffries at the Shirley Chisholm State Office Building in downtown Brooklyn and featured addresses by Professor Barbara Winslow who has written a biography of Ms. Chisholm, Public Advocate Letitia James, Borough President Eric Adams, and Brooklyn NAACP president L. Joy Williams. Congresswoman Barbara Lee sent [her greetings via a video](#) made especially for us. The event was co-sponsored by Teamsters local 237, the Alliance of Retired Americans of NY State, and the U.S. Postal Service. A number of attendees expressed interest in becoming League members.

Also, please join the **League of Women Voters of the City of New York Education Fund** in presenting its 2014 Annual Awards on Friday, May 2nd, from Noon - 2PM at the historic Roosevelt Hotel in Manhattan. Commentary to be delivered by Bill Ritter, WABC Eyewitness News Anchor. To make a reservation, call the office at 212-725-3541 or go to their website: <http://www.lwvnyc.org/>.

LWV of Rye, Rye Brook & Port Chester has been conducting voter registration drives at the Rye High School. Students who turn 18 before the end of 2014 can register to vote now. The League also has presented voter information in high school classes.

The natural resources committee of the **LWV of Tompkins County** held a very successful event about Cayuga Lake and its watershed last month.

Earlier this month, the **LWV of East Nassau** co-sponsored, "Redistricting in Nassau: What Can You Do? The Chalk is in Your Hands." Other sponsors included Nassau United Redistricting Coalition and the Center for Civic Engagement.

The **LWV of Utica/Rome** is hosting a membership meeting to discuss, *The Economic Transformation of the Mohawk Valley - Building a Nano-Cyber Corridor* with Steve DiMeo, President of Mohawk Valley EDGE presenting.

As a spin-off from their Agriculture Study, **LWV of Rochester** held a forum entitled, *Who Cares About Hunger? We Do!* sponsored by Foodlink and the LWVs of Wayne County and Rochester Metro Area and the Social Justice Council of the First Unitarian Church of Rochester. The distinguished panel included: US Representative Louise Slaughter; Julia Tedesco, Foodlink Co-Executive Director and Chief Development & Communications Officer; and Lori O'Brien, Supervising Attorney, Nutrition Outreach & Education Program (NOEP) of Legal Assistance of Western New York Inc.

Voter service committee members from the **LWV of White Plains** are planning a series of spring presentations at local high schools called Vote18. This program is designed to encourage eligible students to register to vote and to exercise their right to vote whether in local elections or when they are away at school. It is an interactive program which will be presented in classrooms by teams of two League Members. The White Plains League also plans two presentations in the next few weeks: one on the City of White Plains budget and the other a school board candidate forum.

A trial League membership is offered by the **LWV of Syracuse**. People are encouraged to "try" their League membership for 6 months. Many have become regular members after the trial period. Contact LWV of Syracuse for more information.

The **LWV of Chemung County** joined with the American Association of University Women to sponsor an event in honor of Equal Pay Day. Next month, they will be holding two school board candidate forums.

Many local Leagues have also formed study committees for the state League studies on Term Limits and Ballot Access. Thank you!

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